

ISSUE AREA : Timber Management

- What level of sustained annual yield of timber products should the Forest provide while still maintaining Forest productivity and meeting local, regional and national needs? How much timber land should be managed for wood fiber production, what species should be favored, and what management methods will be used to achieve the desired harvest level and species mix?

In many ways this issue is inseparable from the previous issue termed "economic stability". Responses to the draft documents indicated a great deal of concern for the effect the proposed plan would have on the local economies at a time when eastern Oregon communities were suffering serious economic hardship. Many writers feared that their means of livelihood would be lost if the proposed plan were implemented. But there were also expressions of support for the proposed plan, as well as support for a reduced level of timber harvest. Frequently respondents cited neither a preference for increase or decrease, but a genuine concern that the harvest level be sustainable for future generations. I carefully considered all points of view, including two new alternatives suggested by publics that were incorporated into the analysis.

It is my decision to select an alternative with an average annual allowable sale quantity (ASQ) of 34.8 million cubic feet (MMCF) or 200 million board feet (MMBF) of timber. The ASQ is the upper limit of chargeable wood to be sold from suitable forest land during a decade of the planning period. Although it is a decadal figure, it is most often expressed on an annual basis as the "average annual allowable sale quantity". It is important to note that ASQ is not an actual proposal for timber sale offerings. The annual timber sale offerings include non-chargeable as well as chargeable material and depends on budget appropriations, multiple use objectives, and market conditions.

Chargeable volume, or the ASQ, is composed of categories of timber which were used in making growth and yield projections during the development of the Plan. On the Malheur National Forest, this will include some mortality salvage. Other volume (non-chargeable) was not used in yield calculations because it did not meet regional utilization standards or standards for soundness, or because it is to be harvested from lands not suitable for timber production (i.e., salvage from a nonscheduled wildlife emphasis area such as in Management Area 21). Harvest from unsuitable lands occurs only when removal of the timber will meet the goals and objectives of the management area.

From the total suitable acres, the average annual ASQ is planned to be 34.8 MMCF (200 MMBF) over the next 10 years. An additional 3.6 MMCF (11 MMBF) per year of non-chargeable volume is expected to be harvested annually over the next decade in the form of salvage cutting, cull logs, and miscellaneous products such as firewood and posts and poles. The total volume sold (chargeable plus non-chargeable) is referred to as the annual timber sale program quantity (TSPQ). The TSPQ will be 38.4 MMCF (211 MMBF) per year. To achieve this TSPQ yearly targets are developed. This TSPQ is a decrease of 17 MMBF over the quantity sold during the past 10 years but roughly the same as the volume sold during the past 20 years.

A note on units of measure: Timber outputs will be monitored and controlled on a cubic foot measure. The board foot volume associated with the cubic foot volume (i.e., the board foot/cubic foot conversion ratio) varies from stand to stand depending on the size and form of trees. Both board foot and cubic foot measures (MMBF and MMCF) are displayed below since the board foot measure continues to be a customary unit of measure.

Alternative I schedules harvest on 835,970 acres (80% of those lands that were available and tentatively suitable for timber management) on the Malheur National Forest. In addition I have asked the Forest Supervisor to bring back into the suitable base an additional 29,090 acres of "economically inefficient" lands. This has been discussed in greater detail under the previous issue called "economic suitability".

The ASQ is divided into two categories: volume scheduled from inventoried roadless areas and volume scheduled elsewhere on the Forest. If the volume scheduled from inventoried roadless areas cannot be sold, that volume will not be replaced by volume scheduled elsewhere. Volume scheduled from inventoried roadless areas is estimated to be 18.6 MMCF (108 MMBF) or 5.4% of the ASQ in the first decade. During implementation, the specific volume from roadless areas will be determined through site specific analysis. If the volume cannot be sold, the plan may be amended.

A portion of the average annual ASQ established in this plan depends on the application of intensive timber management practices, including thinnings and plantation establishment, which may occur as part of even-aged or uneven-aged management. Which practices can or should be used depends on budget appropriations and site-specific analysis. If these intensive management practices are not carried out, the ASQ will be reduced and the plan will be amended.

Of the total sell volume, roughly 16.1 MMCF per year (92 MMBF), or 46%, is expected to be ponderosa pine during the first decade. About 30% of this volume, or 30 MMBF will be small diameter material from commercial thinnings.

The State of Oregon has brought to my attention that local industries need ample time to adjust to the changing harvest conditions in addition to the need to have a stable supply of ponderosa pine volume. Therefore I have asked the Forest Supervisor to make every effort to rampdown the sell volume for ponderosa pine during the first decade to reach a sustainable level in the second decade.

In general, the volume of ponderosa pine is decreasing. By reducing the amount of ponderosa pine, this Forest Plan brings the mix of species offered for sale closer to the mix reflected in the standing timber inventory. While the total ASQ level (in cubic feet) is sustainable through time, the ponderosa pine portion of the ASQ is not. Despite our efforts to create a smooth transition to a sustainable level, it is highly probable that the ponderosa pine offerings will fluctuate in future decades to compensate for accelerated harvest over the last 10 years.

Many publics, including the State of Oregon, emphasized the need to reduce even-aged management and place a stronger emphasis on uneven-aged management. Our analysis shows that uneven-aged management techniques can be used to complement many resource objectives such as visuals and riparian. For example, clearcutting (even-aged management) in riparian areas does not meet the riparian objective of providing stream shading, whereas selective cutting of individual trees or groups of trees can occur while still meeting the riparian objective of stream shading. This is just one example of where uneven-aged management harvesting techniques can complement other resource objectives.

On the other hand our analysis also shows that uneven-aged management conflicts with wildlife cover objectives. For example, a stand of trees which is selectively harvested (individual trees removed from throughout the stand) will not meet cover standards in that the canopy will be too open.

Because uneven-aged management has not been used as intensively in the past as even-aged management, we do not have the knowledge base to draw upon. It appears that this technique has many benefits, therefore I have decided to proceed cautiously by harvesting 64,242 acres (22% of the suitable land base) with uneven-aged techniques during the first decade. We will monitor and evaluate this management techniques to ensure that Forest Plan goals are being met. This roughly doubles the amount of acres in uneven-aged management from the draft. The remaining 214,930 acres (78%) will emphasize even-age management.

Of the land scheduled for timber harvest, approximately 56% will be intensively managed for a full yield of timber. Over the next 10 years, approximately 6,300 acres of two-storied stands will be harvested annually using overstory removal harvest methods. During this time approximately 3,330 acres will be

harvested annually using clearcut harvest methods. This method of management is expected to be fully compatible with the multiple use management goals for those lands. The lands on which less-than-full-yield timber management occurs reflect modifications for resources such as riparian habitat, visual corridors, and uneven-aged management or even-aged management in the General Forest Management Area to produce more ponderosa pine volume in later decades. Under Alternative I, growth on commercial forest lands will be increased from an average of 21 cubic feet per acre per year to 39 cubic feet per acre per year by the year 2039.

Over the past decade, there have been serious insect epidemics and several forest fires on the Malheur National Forest. In view of these events, and more, there are many people who suspect that the timber inventory for the Forest has been significantly reduced, thereby casting doubt on the ASQ calculation. I am very concerned that the timber inventory may not accurately reflect the current conditions. The Forest shares this concern and has initiated a new vegetation inventory (including timber). The vegetation mapping phase will be complete in 1991 and managed stand survey data is expected to be available in 1992. This new data will be compared with the inventory used in the Forest Plan and if significant differences are apparent, adjustments in the projected ASQ will be made and a plan amendment issued.

The entire timber inventory will be completed around 1995 or 1996. At that time breakage and defect data will be available. If breakage and defect data, along with the entire timber inventory, reflects significant differences from the data used in developing this Plan, adjustments will be made in the ASQ and the Plan amended.

After reviewing the analyses, I selected a revised land allocation for Alternative I that will provide an additional 2 MMBF annually on the southern half of the forest, particularly in the Malheur and Silvies drainages. This was accomplished by increasing the amount of area to be managed for timber emphasis by reducing satisfactory cover standards on the southern half of the Forest. My intent was to ensure that an adequate, stable timber supply can be realized. This subject is discussed in more detail under the issue big-game habitat.

The decision I have made has not been easy, but I feel confident that I have weighed the trade-offs and selected an alternative which not only provides for an adequate supply of timber, but increases the emphasis on ponderosa pine while protecting other multiple resource uses; however, I am also aware of a rapidly changing insect and disease situation and fully expect the Forest Supervisor to analyze and treat the forest accordingly to promote a healthy forest and range ecosystem. This may require an amendment to the plan in the near future.

ISSUE AREA : Road Management

- How can road management be used to make timber harvest, big-game habitat needs, and recreation opportunities more compatible?

Currently the Malheur National Forest, in conjunction with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, has four Cooperative Travel Management Areas. These seasonal road closures are designed to protect wildlife habitat, minimize harassment of wildlife, maintain adequate buck and bull escapement, and promote nonmotorized hunting. These management areas are under the "green dot system" during the hunting seasons, with enforcement through the State Police and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Total National Forest land affected by these seasonal closures is approximately 172,000 acres.